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ABSTRACT

Noting that in Wisconsin, 146 children have died as a result of gunfire in the preceding 5 years [1996-2000], this report provides a detailed look at the issue of handgun safety from the perspective of citizens living in Wisconsin. Participating in the state-wide telephone interviews were 600 adult residents representative of the adult state population with respect to race, gender, education, income, and geography. Survey findings revealed that the majority of Wisconsin citizens are in favor of gun control but are also opposed to measures that would ban handguns entirely or make them easier to obtain. Seventy percent support handgun safety legislative action and most believe there should be laws requiring handguns to have safety features. Most residents do not believe that handguns in homes or in the hands of women deter violence. The most often cited causes of handgun violence were gangs and drugs. Other factors related to handgun violence included improper handgun storage, lack of training in the proper use of handguns, the media, and domestic violence. Most respondents do not believe that gun violence is getting worse in their communities or that handguns can be easily obtained. Gun ownership has increased among Wisconsin residents significantly, with 50 percent of households owning a shotgun, up from 38 percent in the late 1990s. Twenty-six percent of households have handguns, up from 8 percent in 1997. In addition to survey findings, the report includes an essay discussing the effects that violence has on children and focusing on the cognitive, emotional, and developmental harm done by witnessing or being a victim of violence. A description of the survey methodology is appended. (KB)

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AIMING FOR SAFETY

A SURVEY OF PUBLIC OPINION ON GUN POLICY IN WISCONSIN

ED 475 173

Firearm deaths

WISCONSIN

Suicide rate is higher in Wisconsin

White males

Firearms most often used in homicide, suicide

homicide and ods in Wisconsin

iend accidentally sh

ahie police say semiautomatic handgun was unloaded fired, hitting child in chest

for role in fatal shooting

Firearm that recognizes owner could be used by 2000, manufacturer says

By Dave Daley

of the Journal Sentinel staff

Howard was sentenced on a charge of being a party to first-degree reckless homicide while armed. He pleaded guilty to the charge in July.

October day but also implica another man as having h shots. Public defenders Moore and Barry Slagle c tended that the other, charged shooter was likely killer.

tence given arked by nder bender

r owner lies after n accident

osha man removed azine from weapon, mmunition remained

PS

By David Cole

ecial to the Journal Sentinel

nosha — A Kenosha tavern

West side boy, 7, killed in gun accident

After finding weapon in drawer, he apparently tripped with it, was shot

his father's house in the N.

By Vikki Ort

of the

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Gun suici high in north

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By JESSICA McBRIDE and JAMES R. BURNETT III

of the Journal Sentinel staff

The North Woods might mean peace and quiet for many, but it has a higher rate of firearm sui cide than anywhere else in the state, with young men

Wisconsin area

more likely their lives

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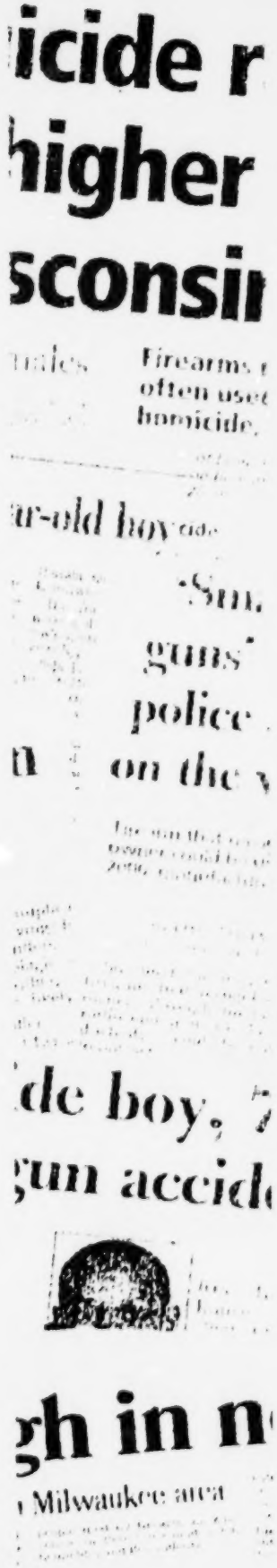

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Introduction

Every day in this country, nine children are killed by gunfire - that's one boy or girl every two and one half hours. Here in Wisconsin, 146 children have died as a result of gunfire in the last five years, and many more have been injured or witnessed violence.[i] National studies indicate that for every gun related fatality there are four gun-inflicted injuries.

In 2001, the Brady Foundation gave Wisconsin a rating of C+. Cited as positive factors were: 1) adequate juvenile possession and sales restrictions; 2) the Child Access Prevention law; 3) the ban on carrying concealed weapons; and 4) a 48-hour waiting period for handgun purchases. However, Wisconsin does not have any consumer safety standards; does not require background checks for private sales; and prohibits local municipalities from enacting stricter laws.[ii]

Gun Fact:
According to the Centers for Disease Control, the rate of firearm death for children under 15 is twelve times higher for kids in the US than for twenty-five other industrialized nations combined.

While advocates for gun regulation argue with the gun lobby over the extent to which guns should be regulated for adults, most people in both groups agree that young children should not have access to firearms.

Through a grant from the National Association of Child Advocates and the Annie E. Casey Foundation, the Council commissioned a survey by the Public Policy Forum of Milwaukee to assess public opinion on legislative measures that could keep children safe from gun injury and death. Public opinion surveys can guide policy decisions, by helping state and community leaders understand public concerns. The objective of this report is to provide a detailed look at the issue of handgun safety from the perspective of citizens who live in the State of Wisconsin.

This report presents information from the fourth in a series of surveys about handgun safety that have been conducted over the past six years by the Public Policy Forum. The Forum, a nonpartisan, non-profit research organization based in Milwaukee, conducts research on public policy issues.

Aiming for Safety: A Survey of Public Opinion on Gun Policy is intended to amplify the voice of the majority of Wisconsin residents who favor sensible gun policy. A majority of those surveyed support state legislation that does not limit gun sports enthusiasts, yet makes access to guns more difficult for criminals and children. These common sense policies fall into two main categories: 1) restricting access to guns by children; and 2) treating guns like every other consumer product.

This year, Public Knowledge , an independent consulting firm, conducted focus groups on this issue in four cities around the country including Appleton, Wisconsin. Participants overwhelmingly supported laws aimed at keeping children safe from guns. These opinions square with the majority of survey

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respondents who favor policy changes such as background checks for *all* gun sales (not just sales from licensed gun dealers per current law) and a continued ban on carrying concealed loaded guns in Wisconsin. In addition, most focus group participants were surprised to learn that no consumer safety standards exist for guns made in the U.S.

Gun Fact:

The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends that guns be removed from homes with children. Yet, studies estimate that less than 40 percent of households with children and guns, keep their guns locked and unloaded.

Guns, like prescription drugs, insecticides and many household cleaners, are inherently dangerous. The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) regulates medications; the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) tests chemicals to make certain that they are safe for the environment. Even toys are regulated to make certain they don't have small parts that could present a hazard for children [Consumer Products Safety Commission (CPSC)]. Yet, the federal government does not regulate guns.[iii] States, however, are getting into the act. In several states, the Legislature and Attorney General have implemented gun safety standards that must be applied to all sales of firearms in their states. For example, Massachusetts requires pistols sold in the state to have either a magazine disconnect safety or a chamber loaded indicator to prevent unintentional shootings.[iv]

In addition to the survey results and analysis, we begin this report with an essay by Dr. William Perloff, entitled "Childhood Violence: A Plague on Society." Dr. Perloff, a pediatrician, is the Chair of the Wisconsin Child Fatality Review Team, the Wisconsin Emergency Medical Services for Children Advisory Board and is a member of the WCCF Board of Directors. Dr. Perloff discusses the profound effect that violence has on children. Whether as victims or witnesses, children are harmed cognitively, emotionally, and developmentally, according to Dr. Perloff.

This year, rather than publishing our annual data book covering a broad array of issues affecting children, we have chosen to focus on several areas of child well-being in Wisconsin. This report is the fourth in a series of WisKids Special Reports that focus on specific issues for children in our state. *Children's Mental Health, From Parenting to Policy Making* was published in December. The first, *Affordable Housing, a Crisis for Wisconsin Families,* was released in May 2002. *Standardized Testing, One Size Fits All?* was published in October 2002.

For detailed survey results and the survey questions please see the Wisconsin Council on Children and Families web site *www.wccf.org* .

[i] From 1996 to 2000 there were 66 firearm suicides, 60 firearm homicides and 16 unintended firearm deaths to children under the age of 18. Data are from the Firearm Injury Prevention Center at the Medical College of Wisconsin.

[ii] Brady Campaign to Prevent Gun Violence, Web Address: http://www.handguncontrol.org/

[iii] *Making a Killing, the Business of Guns in America,* Tom Diaz, The New Press, 1999.

[iv] Targeting Safety, How State Attorneys General Can Act Now to Save Lives, Center to Prevent Handgun Violence, 2001

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Childhood Violence: A Plague On Society

BY WILLIAM H. PERLOFF, M.D., Ph.D., FAAP

Introduction

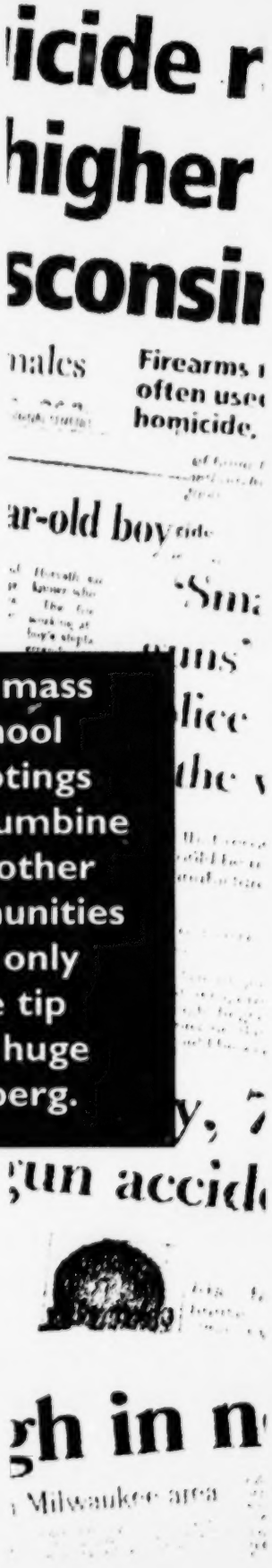
Childhood violence is endemic in our society, constituting a major public health problem. Children experience violence in many forms: as witnesses of domestic and community violence, as victims of physical and sexual abuse, or as participants in interpersonal violence or attempted suicide. Violent injury and death due to altercations between family members and acquaintances occur far more often than from criminal activity by strangers. When coupled with firearms, the violence assumes its most lethal form. The mass school shootings in Columbine and other communities are only the tip of a huge iceberg. More than 4,000 children and adolescents under 20 years of age are victims of firearm-related death annually in the United States. Indeed, more childhood firearm-related deaths occur in the U.S. than in the other 25 most prosperous nations combined.

The mass school shootings in Columbine and other communities are only the tip of a huge iceberg.

Effects of Violence

Violence has both direct and indirect effects on children and their development, ranging from death to injury and physical and emotional disability. It is clear that violent behavior has its antecedents in early childhood, the effects of which persist into adolescence and beyond. Mortality is the most dramatic and readily measurable consequence, and firearms are the usual cause. Approximately 100 Wisconsin infants, children and adolescents from birth to 19 years of age die from inflicted violence annually. Nearly one-half of these are due to homicide; most of the rest are due to suicide in the adolescent age group. Males are the victims of violent death in childhood more than 80 percent of the time, with firearms involved in almost 90 percent of the homicides and more than 75 percent of the suicides. The homicides are perpetrated primarily with handguns. Firearm-related homicide is the leading cause of death for African-American males from 15 to 19 years of age in Wisconsin and nationally. Teenage boys in all racial and ethnic groups are more likely to die from gunshot wounds than from all natural causes combined.

Suicide by adolescents is most often an impulsive act, reflecting the volatile emotions in this stage of life. Twenty percent of Wisconsin high school students admit to having seriously considered suicide,



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and nine percent claim to have attempted it. Suicide attempts involving firearms are successful 91 percent of the time, denying a chance to reconsider. This contrasts to the 23 percent mortality from attempts involving drug overdoses.

It is estimated that there were 192 million firearms in the U.S. in 1994, 65 million of which were handguns, and 127 million were long guns. Fifty-five percent of handgun owners report leaving the guns loaded; many leave them loaded and unlocked. Gun ownership is a risk factor for firearm death in the home. A gun in the home is 37 times more likely to be used in a suicide and nearly five times more likely to be used in a criminal homicide than in self-defense. Suicide is five times and homicide three times more common in homes with guns than without.

Suicide is five times more likely and homicide three times more common in homes with guns than without.

According to the 2001 Wisconsin Youth Risk Behavior Survey, 46 percent of high school boys had carried a weapon in the previous month; eight percent had carried a gun (exclusive of hunting) Family and friends are the primary sources of guns for young people; only five percent have asked someone else to purchase a gun for them from legal or illegal sources. The significance of the availability of handguns is illustrated by the differences in assault and homicide rates in two sister cities: Vancouver, British Columbia, and Seattle, Washington. The much lower rate of assault and homicide in Vancouver has been attributed to regulation of the availability of handguns there.

Approximately five unintentional childhood deaths due to firearms occur annually in Wisconsin. A typical scenario is that of an unsupervised toddler or young child discovering a loaded handgun and killing himself or a playmate while exploring the new "toy." In one recent study, more than three-fourths of eight to 12 year old boys who found a real handgun in a drawer handled the weapon. Approximately half of them pulled the trigger, despite having had gun safety instruction at some time prior to the study.

For every firearm-related death, there are between four and five nonfatal gun-related injuries. Among children under 15 years of age, the preponderance of injuries is unintentional. Two-thirds of the injuries in the 15 - 19 year old group are due to assault. Approximately one-half of injuries are severe enough to require admission to the hospital. Physical sequellae range from the trivial to profound disability. The number of individuals left paralyzed by a bullet each year is comparable to the total number paralyzed due to the polio epidemic of the 1950s. Psychological effects include anxiety and persistent symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Violent injury tends to recur in more than 40 percent of cases, with a five-year mortality of 20 percent in urban settings.

As witnesses to violence, children are harmed cognitively, emotionally, and developmentally. Furthermore, exposure to violence and victimization are strongly associated with subsequent violent

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behavior by those exposed. Exposure to violence in TV shows, video games and movies also can lead to increased aggressive attitudes, values, and behavior in children. Studies of the effects of incessant TV violence on children suggest that they may: 1) become immune to the real horror of violence; 2) come to accept violence as a way to solve problems; 3) imitate the violence they observe; and 4) identify with victims or victimizers in unhealthy ways.

It is estimated that the mean medical cost per gunshot injury is approximately $17,000. In 1994 in the U.S., this translated to $2.3 billion in lifetime medical costs, of which almost one-half was paid by U.S. taxpayers. This estimate did not include the much greater economic cost of lost productivity for those who died or became permanently disabled. Based on an estimated 450 childhood gunshot injuries to Wisconsin children, the direct medical costs are approximately $7.7 million. The true costs to society are, of course, much greater.

Principles, Priorities and Recommendations

Youth violence can and must be prevented. The complex and pervasive nature of firearm-related violence in our society makes it clear that a comprehensive, broad-based approach is needed. The data discussed above suggest that at least three principles should underlie attempts at solutions:

1. Important long-term social changes that lead to reduced childhood exposure to violence are essential. Short term approaches such as building more prisons for violent offenders will not solve the problem.

2. Involvement of the entire community is required, from individual families to schools to public health and social service agencies to health and mental health professionals to child and community advocates to law enforcement and the justice system to the political leadership to the media. A concerted effort from all segments of society is needed to improve the safety and well-being of all children and youth.

3. Inappropriate access of children and adolescents to firearms, especially handguns, is an essential component of any approach to reduce the unconscionably high firearm-related childhood mortality rate in Wisconsin and the United States. It is clear that intentional firearm use by adolescents, whether for assault or suicide, is impulsive, and unintentional use is not susceptible to training.

Youth violence can and must be prevented. The complex and pervasive nature of firearm-related violence in our society makes it clear that a comprehensive, broad-based approach is needed.

Translating these principles into action requires establishing specific priorities from which actions can flow. A major resource for guidance in mobilizing community efforts is the

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Commission for the Prevention of Youth Violence (CPYV). Funded by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, CPYV is composed of representatives from medical, nursing, psychiatric, public health and governmental constituencies. Based on extensive review of the literature and hearings involving scores of witnesses from all segments of the community, the CPYV has identified seven key priorities for reducing youth violence. These are summarized below and quoted in part, with some modifications to adapt them to a statewide focus.

Communities exert powerful influences on the ability of families to raise healthy children. Healthy communities support healthy families.

Priority 1: Support the development of healthy families.
Violence prevention begins in the home. Children exposed to violence, either as witnesses or victims, are at risk for committing violence themselves. Basic support includes affordable housing, access to health care, employment, quality day care, quality education, and safe neighborhoods. Specific focus must be directed at teenage parents.

Priority 2: Promote healthy communities.
Communities exert powerful influences on the ability of families to raise healthy children. Healthy communities support healthy families,

Priority 3: Enhance services for early identification and intervention for children, youth, and families at risk for, or involved in violence.
Coordinated, community-wide programs and services that are able to identify and intervene as early as possible to prevent violence in at-risk families and individuals must be available.

Priority 4: Increase access to health and mental health care services.
These services can play an important role in violence prevention (preferable) and treatment.

Priority 5: Reduce access to and risk from firearms for children and youth.
It is essential to eliminate easy and unsupervised access to firearms by children and youth, improving firearm safety, and creating a community environment that supports nonviolent solutions to conflict.

Priority 6: Reduce exposure to media violence.
Parents and the media industry must be responsive to the extensive evidence documenting the strong, pervasive, and deleterious effects of media violence on children.

Priority 7: Ensure state and national support and advocacy for solutions to violence through research, public policy, legislation, and funding.
Clearly the problem of violence transcends the ability of individual communities to solve, without the commitment at the state (and national) level for funding and support of coordinated and comprehensive programs.

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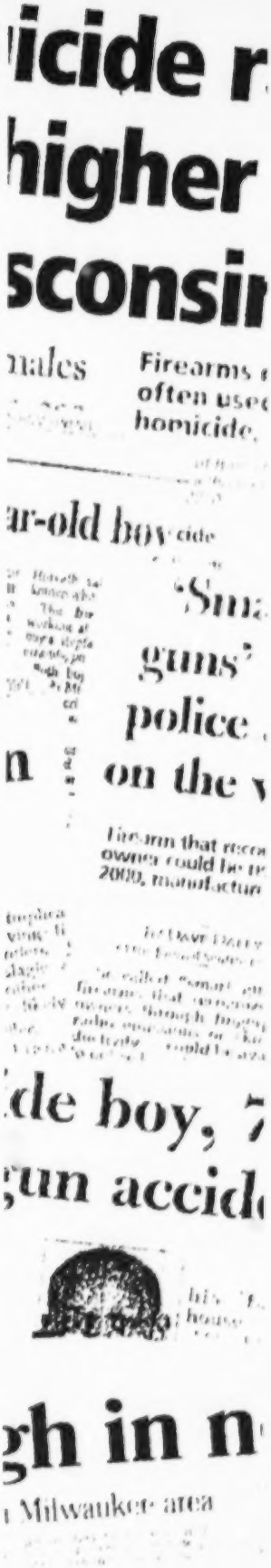
The effects of violence on the lives of everyone are too profound and pervasive not to make the effort to eliminate this plague. Together, we can do it.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

Dr. William Perloff is a pediatrician in Bailey's Harbor and Chair of the Wisconsin Child Fatality Review Team and the Wisconsin Emergency Medical Services for Children Advisory Board and a member of the Board of Directors of The Wisconsin Council on Children and Families.



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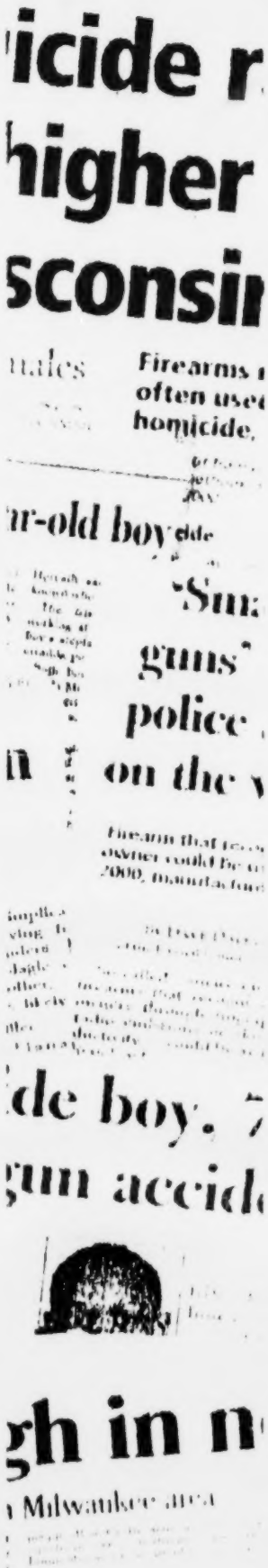

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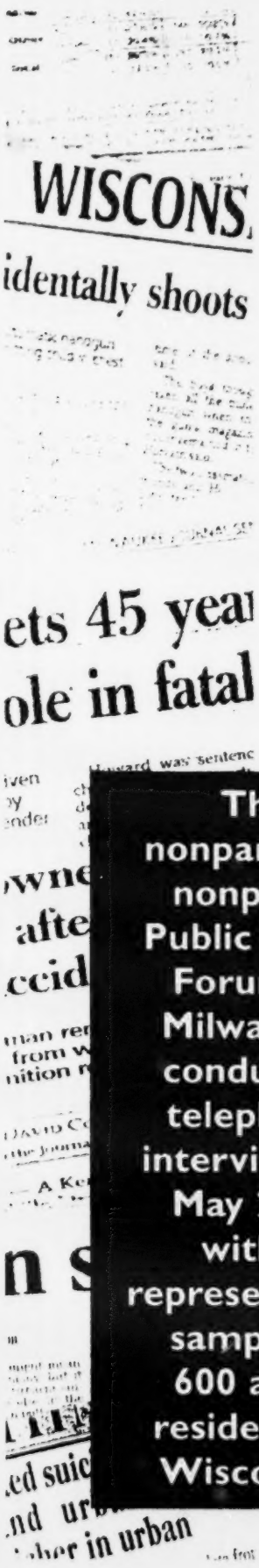

Aiming for Safety: A Survey of Public Opinion on Gun Policy

BY THE PUBLIC POLICY FORUM
JEFFREY C. BROWNE, PRESIDENT
EMILY VAN DUNK, Ph.D., SENIOR RESEARCHER

Executive Summary

In order to measure public opinion about handgun safety in Wisconsin, the nonpartisan, nonprofit Public Policy Forum of Milwaukee conducted telephone interviews in May 2002 with a representative sample of 600 adult residents of Wisconsin. (The survey methodology is explained in Appendix A.) The survey findings offer the following important insights as Wisconsin policymakers consider methods of protecting both the rights and public safety of Wisconsin families and their guests.

The nonpartisan, nonprofit Public Policy Forum of Milwaukee conducted telephone interviews in May 2002 with a representative sample of 600 adult residents of Wisconsin.

- ***Changes in the Law.*** People want their legislators to take up handgun safety in the next session, and when they do, people want to see an array of changes. A majority of Wisconsinites consider themselves generally in favor of gun control. They support a long list of potential changes in state laws related to handguns, including trigger locks, licensing, registration, manufacturing safety standards and loaded-weapon indicators. However, most people are opposed to measures that would ban handguns entirely or make them easier to obtain.

- ***The Politics of Handguns.*** Seven of every 10 Wisconsinites wants handgun safety to get legislative attention, and voters are more likely to vote for candidates who support handgun regulation.

- ***Consumer Safety.*** Just as there are laws saying all new cars need safety features such as seat belts, most Wisconsin residents believe there should be laws saying handguns need to have safety features.

- ***Is Perception Reality?*** Most Wisconsin residents do not believe that handguns deter violence. Fewer than 30 percent agree that the presence of a handgun in the house is likely to deter criminals or that women who own handguns are safer from violence than women who don't.

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- ***Causes of Gun Violence.*** The most often cited causes of handgun violence are gangs and drugs. Even so, people believe several other factors are related to handgun violence, especially improper storage of handguns, lack of training in proper use of handguns, the media and domestic violence.

- ***Gun Ownership Rising.*** Gun ownership appears to have increased significantly, with 50 percent of households owning a shotgun, up from 38 percent in the late 1990s. Currently, 26 percent of households have handguns, up from eight percent in 1997.

Findings

The survey sought information about public opinion regarding a range of topics related to handgun safety in Wisconsin. Following are the topics and the findings. Comparative results are presented in cases where questions were similar to questions that have been asked in previous statewide surveys. Unless otherwise noted, the numbers in the tables are percentages.

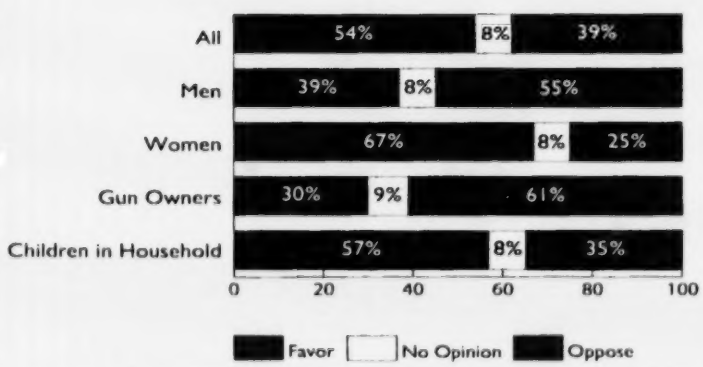
Public Perception about Changes in the Law

A majority of Wisconsinites consider themselves generally in favor of gun control, although the percentage that do has narrowed somewhat in recent years, from 60 percent in 1997 to 53 percent in 2002. Those opposed to the general concept of gun control have increased from 31 percent to 39 percent in that same period, with a deep division on the basis of gender. (Women overwhelmingly favor gun control and a majority of men oppose it.)

Overall, on a scale from one to 10, with one representing weak feelings about the issue and 10 representing the strongest feelings, those surveyed rate the issue a 7.5 on average, indicating fairly strong feelings. Gun-control opponents rate their feelings 7.6, compared to 7.4 for proponents.

Women overwhelmingly favor gun control and a majority of men oppose it.

Chart 1: Views On Gun Control



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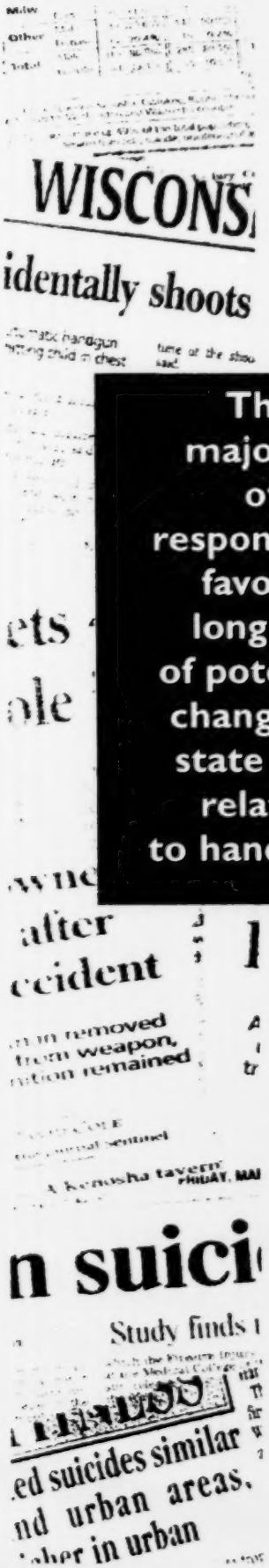
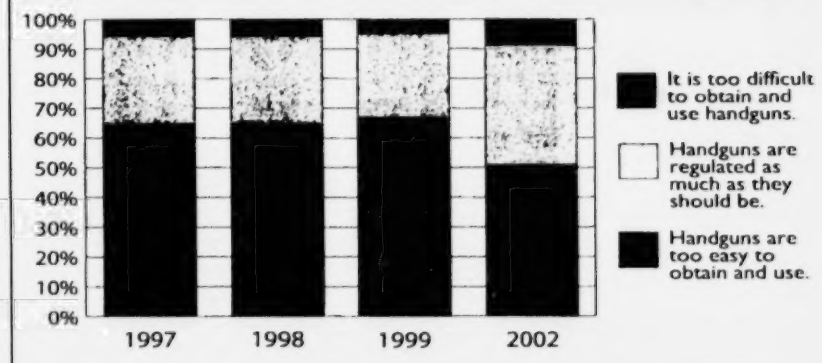


When it comes to the specific issue of handguns, regardless of their position on gun control in general, Wisconsinites tend to say they are satisfied with the current Wisconsin state laws, and dissatisfaction with current law has declined - from 34 percent dissatisfied in 1997 to 23 percent in 2002. On the other hand, a narrow majority of respondents (51%) believe that handguns are currently too easy to obtain and use. That compares to a minority (36%) who believe handguns are regulated about as much as they should be and just four percent that think handguns are over-regulated. As is often the case with questions involving handguns, women are much more likely than men to favor changes in the law. However, the perception that handguns are too easy to obtain and use has declined from a high of 67 percent in 1999, to just over 50 percent in 2002.

The majority of respondents favor a long list of potential changes in state laws related to handguns.

Chart 2: Perceptions About Handgun Regulation



The majority of respondents favor a long list of potential changes in state laws related to handguns, including trigger locks, licensing, registration, manufacturing safety standards, and loaded-weapon indicators. However, most people are opposed to measures that would either ban handguns entirely or make them easier to obtain.

Respondents were asked whether they favor or oppose each of 18 specific changes in policy regarding handguns. These are the potential changes in order of the percentage of respondents favoring the change:

- Require background checks for buyers at gun shows. (89%)
- Require firearms dealers to provide trigger-locking devices with all handgun purchases. (86%)
- Require handguns to have safety locks on them. (83%)
- Require new guns sold in Wisconsin to have built in safety locks. (81%

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- Require people interested in owning a handgun to pass a state test. (77%)
- Require that all handguns have indicators showing whether they are loaded. (77%)
- Require handgun manufacturers to submit models of their handguns to state laboratories to test for compliance with safety standards. (76%)
- Require handgun owners to purchase locks for their handguns. (74%)
- Require long guns to be locked. (71%)
- Require people who already possess a handgun to pass a state test. (58%)
- Create a state agency to set safety standards for the manufacture of handguns. (57%)
- Require the owners of handguns that do not meet state safety standards to surrender the handguns to state authorities. (51%)
- Require a police permit to buy a gun. (45%)
- Prevent the state of Wisconsin and local governments from suing firearms manufacturers. (42%)
- Increase taxes on handgun ammunition. (38%)
- Require communities to provide a safe place to store guns. (37%)
- Allow citizens of Wisconsin to carry concealed weapons. (27%)
- Ban all handguns in the State of Wisconsin. (13%)

Background checks and trigger locks are favored by more than eight of ten survey respondents.

Background checks and trigger locks are favored by more than eight of 10 survey respondents. In addition, several other policy initiatives receive majority support including requiring individuals interested in owning a handgun to pass a state test, requiring that all handguns have indicators showing whether they are loaded and requiring handgun manufacturers to submit models of their handguns to state laboratories to test for compliance with safety standards. However, requiring permits, increasing taxes, and especially banning all handguns were favored by only a small minority of those surveyed.

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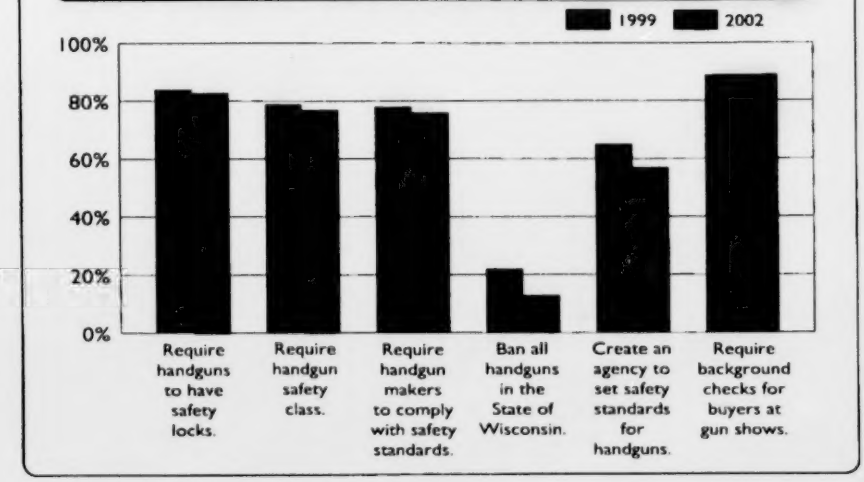
Opinion on these issues has remained remarkably steady over the past six years. No issue changes from receiving majority to minority support. In addition, even a small minority favor banning handguns, 13 percent versus 22 percent in 1999.

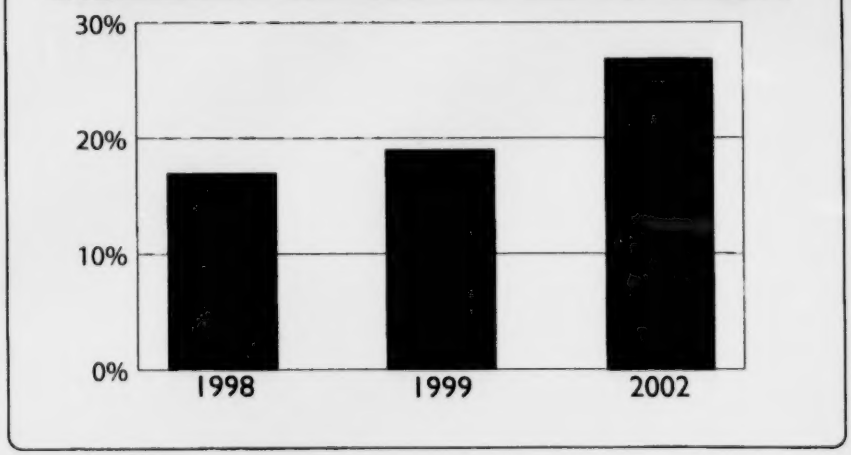
Opinion on these issues has remained remarkably steady over the past six years.

Chart 3: Support For Handgun Policy Changes



Legislation allowing individuals over 21 to obtain licenses to carry concealed weapons was introduced in this last session. Public support for this effort remains low, but has grown slightly since 1999.

Chart 4: Percent Who Favor Allowing Citizens Of Wisconsin to Carry Concealed Weapons.



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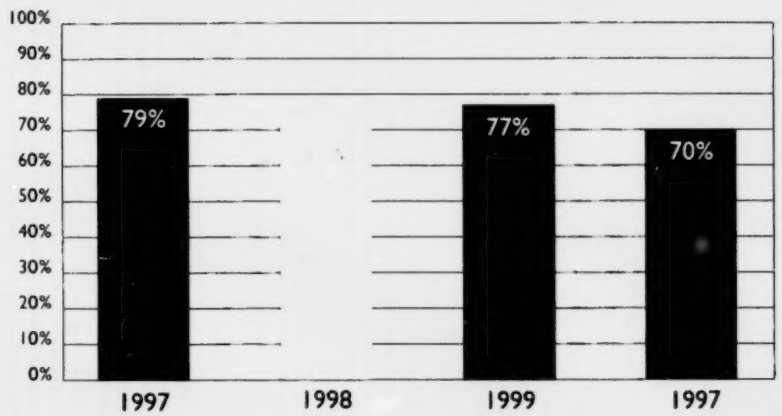
The Politics of Handgun Safety Legislation

Although a variety of legislative actions relating to handguns enjoy widespread support among Wisconsinites, whether that intent can be translated into tangible action is another question. In each of the four surveys that we have conducted on handgun safety over the past six years, we have found consistently high support for having the Wisconsin legislature take up the issue of handgun safety. Overall, 7 of every 10 Wisconsinites want the issue to get the attention of their state legislators; that is a decline somewhat from eight of 10 in 1997.

Chart 5: Percent Who Believe The Wisconsin Legislature Should Take Up Handgun Safety.



In each of the four surveys that we have conducted on handgun safety, we have found consistently high support for having the Wisconsin legislature take up the issue of handgun safety.

As in previous years, women are most likely to support legislative work on this issue. Although both genders favor legislative action, 77 percent of women consider it a priority compared to 61 percent of men. Handgun owners are nearly evenly divided on the question, with 50 percent believing the legislature should take up this issue. For people who do not own guns, 77 percent favor legislative action.

Table 1.
Percent who believe the Wisconsin legislature should take up issue of handgun safety by selected characteristics.

	Total	Male	Female	Gun Owner	Handgun Owner	Non-Gun Owner	Favor Gun Control	Oppose Gun Control
Yes	70	61	77	57	50	77	84	52
No	24	33	16	36	46	17	11	41
Don't know/refused	6	5	7	7	5	6	5	7

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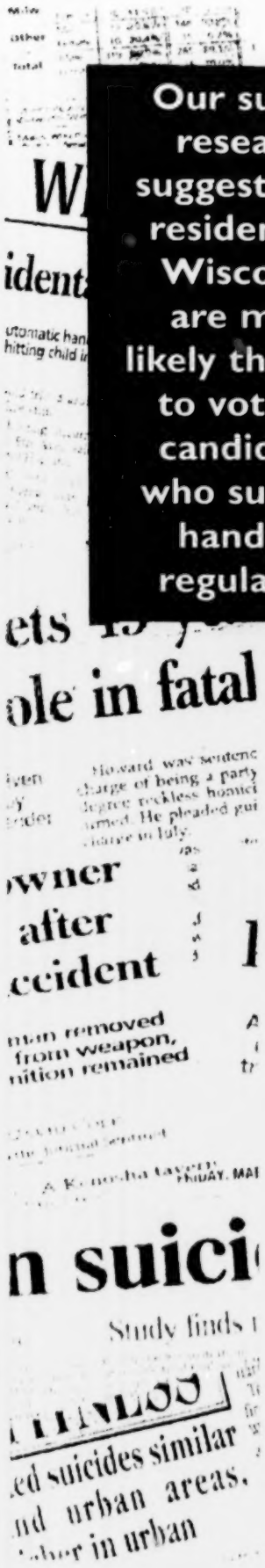

Our survey research suggests that residents of Wisconsin are more likely than not to vote for candidates who support handgun regulation.

A scanning of 2001 legislative proposals indicates that bills involving handguns have centered on opposition to handgun controls. Among these are: expansion of conceal and carry laws; granting of immunity from civil liability for any action brought by an individual or group for an injury or death caused by a firearm; and prohibiting governmental units such as cities or school districts from bringing a lawsuit against a person who manufactures or sells handguns. Specific legislation dealing with handgun safety such as trigger locks or licensing were not introduced in the 2001 legislative session.

Nonetheless, our survey research suggests that residents of Wisconsin are more likely than not to vote for candidates who support handgun regulation. Approximately 64 percent of all those surveyed said they would be more likely to vote for a candidate that supported licensing requirements for handgun owners. Even amongst handgun owners, about one-third would be more likely to vote for a candidate that supports licensing.

Table 2.
If your state legislator expressed support for requiring all individuals who want to own a handgun to pass a state mandated licensing requirement, how would it affect your vote? Would it make you much more likely, somewhat more likely, somewhat less likely or much less likely to vote for the person?

	Total	Male	Female	Gun Owner	Handgun Owner	Non-Gun Owner	Favor Gun Control	Oppose Gun Control
Much more likely	30	21	36	11	13	39	39	15
Somewhat more likely	34	25	41	25	18	38	44	19
Somewhat less likely	18	21	16	24	24	15	9	29
Much less likely	17	30	9	37	44	7	6	34
Don't know/refused	2	3	1	3	2	2	3	2

Even so, opponents of gun regulation tend to be more adamant about their views on the subject. Handgun owners and men are more likely than non-owners of guns, women and proponents of gun regulation to believe a candidate's stand on handgun regulation is important. For example, 57 percent of handgun owners, compared to just 31 percent among people who do not own guns, responded on the survey that a candidate's position on handgun regulation is "very important." Clearly gun control opponents, gun owners and men think they have more of a vested interest in this issue and are more likely to pay attention to this issue during election time.

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Table 3.
How important is a candidate's position on handgun regulation when you decide how to vote in a state legislative election? Is it a very important factor, somewhat important or not at all important?

	Total	Male	Female	Gun Owner	Handgun Owner	Non-Gun Owner	Favor Gun Control	Oppose Gun Control
Very important	36	44	29	44	57	31	30	46
Somewhat important	51	42	58	44	33	55	58	43
Not at all important	12	11	12	11	10	12	12	11

Ultimately, of course, the majority among the public does not decide issues such as handgun legislation. The minority who vote does. Therefore, our analysis compared the responses of likely voters with responses to those less likely to vote in the upcoming November election. Because surveys consistently show that many Wisconsin residents who intend to vote do not actually do so, likely voters were limited to those who responded that they are "absolutely certain" to vote in the November election.

The survey found that likely voters, taken as a whole, tend to resemble the views of gun owners more than they resemble the general population. For example, even though 53 percent of Wisconsinites favor the general concept of gun control, just 41 percent of likely voters do. Among people less likely to vote, 60 percent favor gun control. Similarly, a minority (41% of people who said they are absolutely certain to vote believe that handguns are too easy to obtain and use; that compared to 58 percent of people less likely to vote.

When it comes to specific legislation, most likely voters favor a wide range of potential legislation that would restrict access to handguns, but they are somewhat less likely to favor such measures than is the general population. For example, 68 percent of likely voters favor requiring people interested in owning handguns to pass a state test; although that represents a solid majority, the percentage favoring the measure is much higher (84%) among people less likely to vote. Conversely, likely voters are much more likely (35%) to support allowing citizens to carry concealed weapons than are less likely voters (21%).

When it comes to specific legislation, most likely voters favor a wide range of potential legislation that would restrict access to handguns.

This analysis also reveals why legislative candidates may be reluctant to take a stand on handguns despite broad public support for doing so. When asked how a legislator's support for handgun licensing would affect their votes, 43 percent of likely voters said it would make them less likely to vote for the candidate. Among the group of respondents who are less likely to vote in November, the

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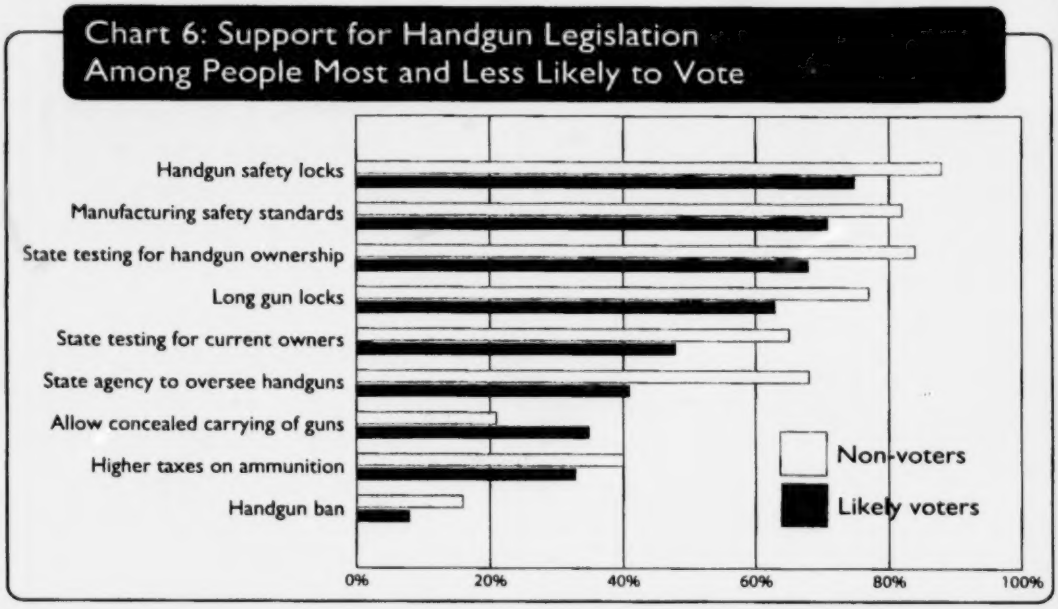
number was 28 percent. Similarly, far more likely voters (45%) than less likely voters (29%) view a candidate's position on handgun regulation as "very important."



Perceptions About Handguns

Most Wisconsin residents do not believe that handguns in homes or in the hands of women deter violence.

Wisconsin residents are divided on whether handguns promote personal safety, with 43 percent agreeing with the notion, 46 percent disagreeing and the remainder expressing no opinion. However, most Wisconsin residents do not believe that handguns in homes or in the hands of women deter violence. Fewer than 30 percent agree that the presence of a handgun in the house is likely to deter criminals or that women who own handguns are safer from violence than women who don't. Although men and gun-owners are more likely to see handguns as promoting safety, both demographic groups are fairly evenly split on the question. For example, whereas 44 percent of gun-owners and 43 percent of men agree that handguns make women safer, 39 percent of gun-owners and 41 percent of men disagree.

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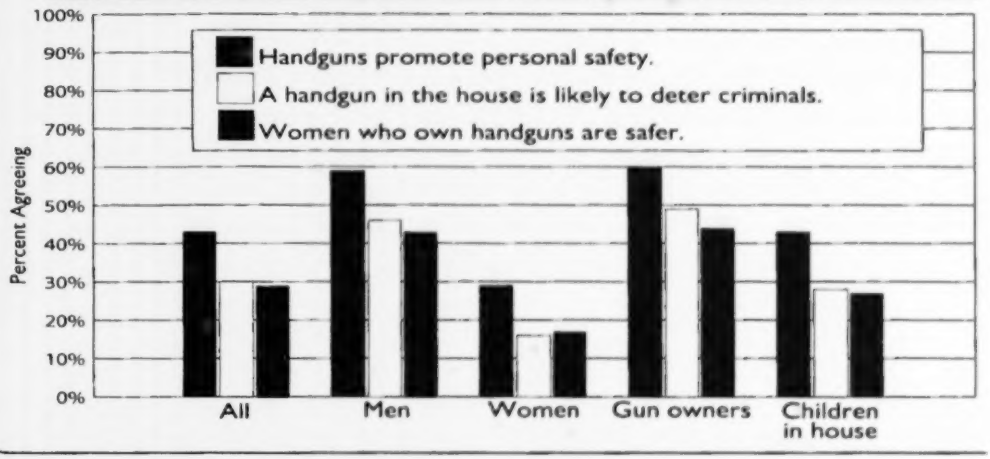
Chart 7: Perceptions About the Effect of Handguns



Those surveyed also differ on other perceptions about handguns, their availability and their effect on society. Most people do not believe that gun violence is getting worse in their communities or that handguns can be easily obtained. However, the majority perceives handgun violence as an issue that extends well beyond urban borders; just 29 percent in the survey agreed with the statement: "Handgun violence is mostly an urban issue." A larger percentage, 43 percent, agree that handguns promote personal safety, but a slightly higher percentage, 46 percent, disagree.

Most people do not believe that gun violence is getting worse in their communities or that handguns can be easily obtained.

Despite the division of opinion overall, there are two concepts related to handguns that resonate across the demographic spectrum. When those surveyed were asked whether they agreed or disagreed with nine separate statements, the following two resonated with survey respondents:

1. **"Bearing a firearm is an American right."** Three-fourths of those surveyed agreed, including the majority of women, non-gun owners and all other demographic groups.

2. **"Just as there are laws saying all new cars need safety features such as seat belts, there should be laws saying handguns need to have safety features."** Of respondents, 83 percent agreed, including the majority of men, handgun owners and all other demographic groups.

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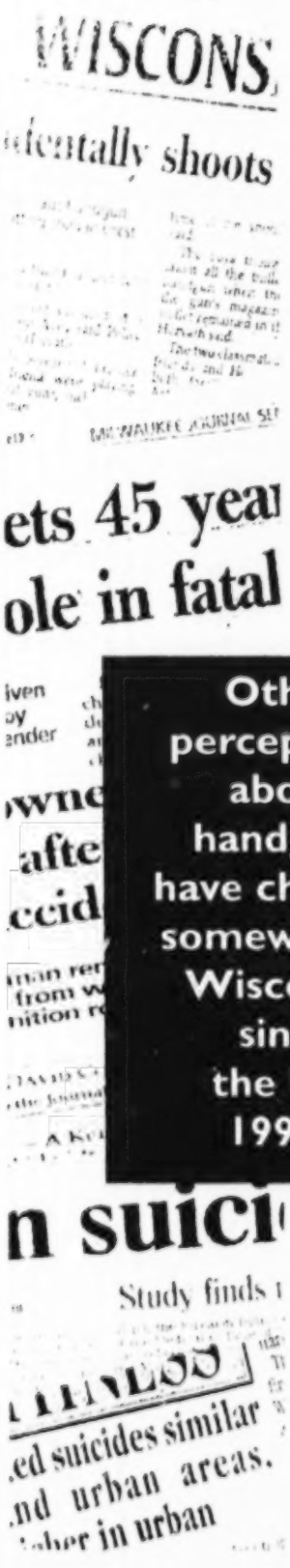
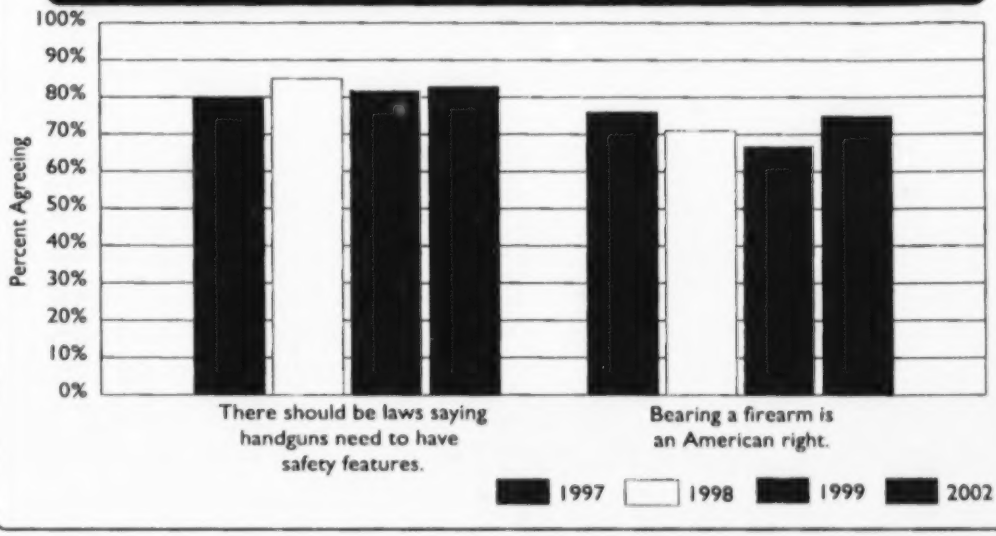


Chart 8: Two Statements About Guns That Resonate With Wisconsin Adults



The extent of agreement on those two fundamental ideas has remained steady over the past five years. However, other perceptions about handguns have changed somewhat in Wisconsin since the late 1990s. The percent of those surveyed who agree that handguns promote personal safety and deter criminals, while still in the minority, has increased somewhat since 1997. And the percent that disagree that women who own handguns are safer has declined from 68 percent to 56 percent.

Other perceptions about handguns have changed somewhat in Wisconsin since the late 1990s.

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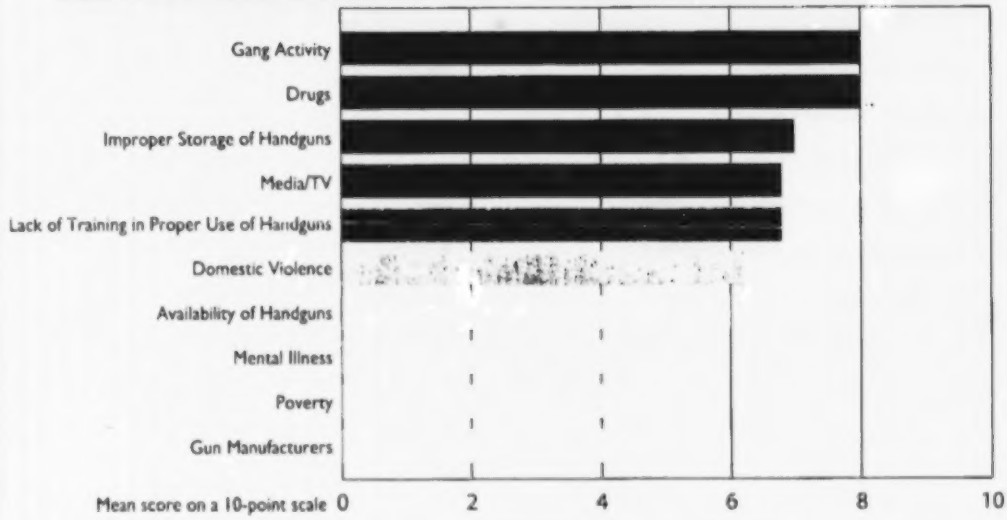
The Causes of Handgun Violence

Wisconsinites tend to perceive that handgun violence correlates more strongly with illegal drug and/or gang activity than with any of a number of other possible factors, although people believe there are several other important factors related to handgun violence as well. Also scoring high among causes of handgun violence: improper storage of handguns, lack of training in proper use of handguns, the media and domestic violence. By contrast, poverty, mental illness and gun manufacturers were less likely to be blamed for handgun violence.

Chart 9: Perceived Relationship Between Handgun Violence And Factors Related to Handgun Violence



Interviewers read a list of 10 possible factors that might be related to handgun violence to survey respondents. Those surveyed were asked to rate each of them on a scale from one to 10, with one meaning the factor was not at all related to handgun violence and 10 meaning it was one of the most important factors. On average, drugs and gang activity each scored an eight on the 10-point scale. Women and people who do not own guns rated both somewhat higher than did men and gun-owners. Factors also scoring high (between six and eight on average) were those relating to gun handling and training as well as domestic issues. Poverty, mental health issues and gun-makers scored an average of five or below.

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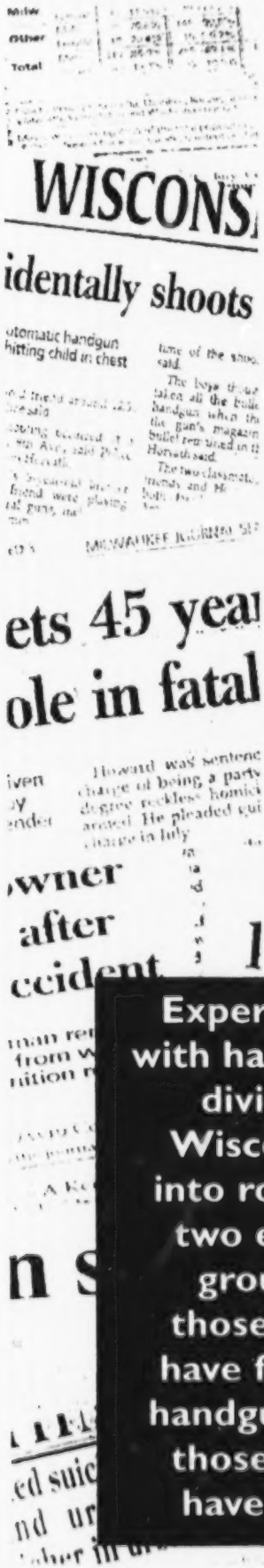
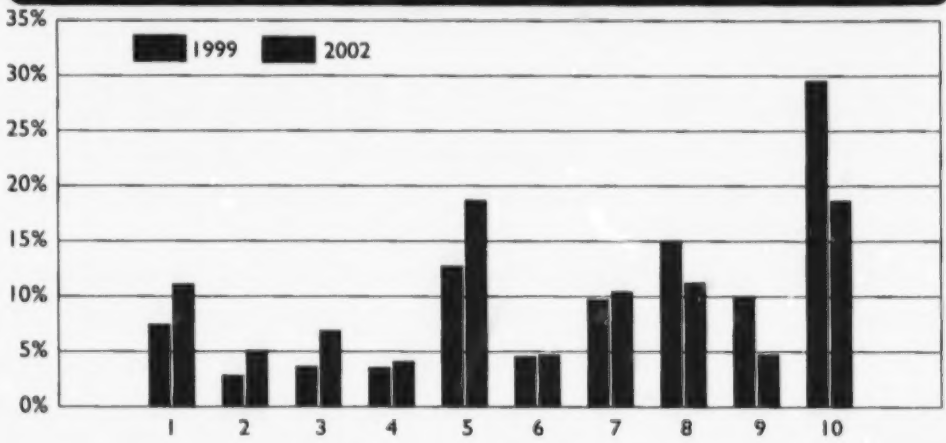


Perceptions about the importance of access to handguns as a factor in handgun violence differ among men and women and have changed in recent years. Women tended far more than men to see the availability of handguns as a key factor in violence; 45 percent of women rated handgun availability an eight or above, compared to just 25 percent of men. When the identical question was asked in 1999, Wisconsinites of both genders were much more likely to relate handgun access to handgun violence. In 1999, 55 percent of respondents rated availability of handguns an eight or above, compared to 35 percent in the latest survey.

Chart 10: Perceived Importance of Handgun Availability as a Factor in Handgun Violence



Experience with handguns divides Wisconsin into roughly two equal groups: those who have fired a handgun and those who have not.

Wisconsin's Experience With Guns and Handguns

Experience with handguns divides Wisconsin adults into two roughly equal groups: those who have fired a handgun and those who have not. Of those surveyed, 54 percent said they had fired a handgun at least once in their lives. Another 27 percent said they had never touched a handgun; whereas, 18 percent said they had touched a handgun, but never fired one.

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However, there is a wide and deep gender gap on this question. Whereas the vast majority of men have experience with handguns (80% having fired one), the majority of women do not; nearly half of all women (45%) said they have never touched a handgun and another 24 percent touched a handgun, but never fired one - nearly 70 percent. On the other hand, nearly eight out of 10 men have fired a handgun, almost all of those more than once.

Chart 11: Which of the following statements best describes your experience with handguns?

These findings carry over into other aspects of experience with guns: whereas just six percent of women said they expect to purchase a handgun in the next two years, 24 percent of men expect to. However, men and women are equally likely to say they have checked the availability or security of guns in homes visited by their children; among both genders, just over 21 percent said they had done so.

Whereas just six percent of women said they expect to purchase a handgun in the next two years, 24 percent of men expect to.

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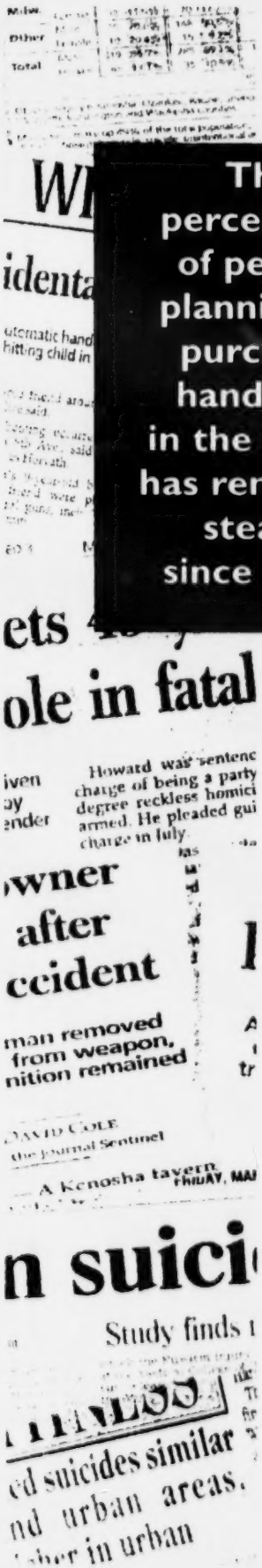

The percentage of people planning to purchase handguns in the future has remained steady since 1997.

The experience of Wisconsinites with guns has changed somewhat in recent years. Gun ownership appears to have increased significantly, with 50 percent in the latest survey saying someone in the household owns a shotgun, up from 38 percent in 1998. In the 2002 survey, 26 percent of respondents said someone in the household owned a handgun, up from 16 percent in 1999, 11 percent in 1998 and just eight percent in 1997. Reasons for the increase are a matter of speculation, but two events that separated the latest survey from previous ones are the 9-11 attack on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon and the "Y2K" anxiety that accompanied the beginning of the new millennium. Two other findings support speculation that such events led to greater experience with handguns; although the percentage of people who have experience firing a handgun increased after those events, the percentage of people planning to purchase handguns in the future has remained steady since 1997.

Chart 12: Does anyone in your household own a...
...handgun? ...shotgun?

Note: Shotgun ownership was not recorded in 1997 and 1999.

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Appendix A — Survey Methodology

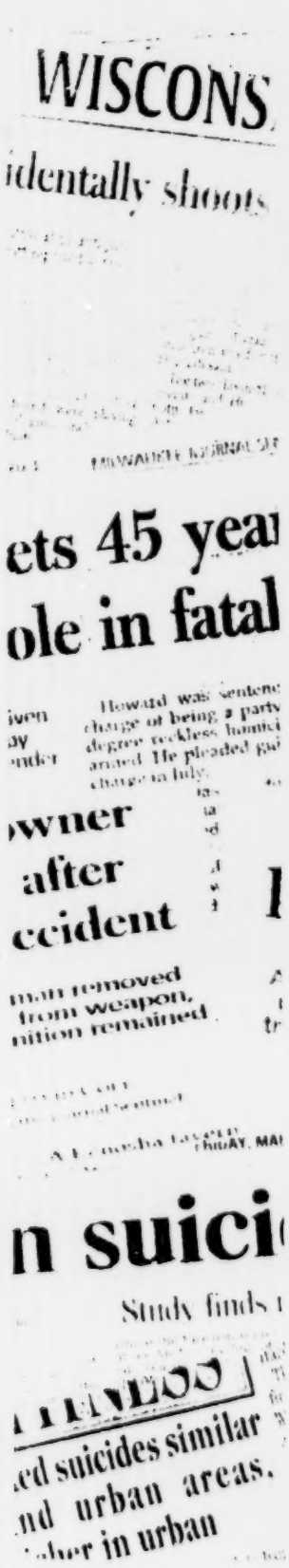
Telephone interviews were conducted in May 2002 with 600 adult residents of Wisconsin. Respondents were representative of the general adult population of the state with respect to race, gender, education, income and geography.

The goal in conducting the survey was to gain an understanding of the knowledge, opinions and attitudes toward handgun violence and safety by adult residents of Wisconsin. The survey included questions about the respondents themselves to control for possible differences in knowledge and opinion based on their own backgrounds.

Interviews were conducted by Lein/Spiegelhoff Inc., a survey research company in Brookfield, Wisconsin. Lein/Spiegelhoff ordered telephone numbers at random from directory listings for the state, plus telephone numbers that are generated at random from the computer to represent unpublished/unlisted numbers. This ensures that the final survey reaches households with telephones regardless of whether the telephone number is published or listed. Interviews were conducted with the adult in a household who "...celebrated the most recent birthday." If the person was not available, an appointment was made for a callback. As many as three callbacks were conducted.

Even when the telephone sample is random, there is imprecision that exists between the sample results and the population. The magnitude of the imprecision is reduced as the sample population increases. The following table identifies the number of interviews completed and the sampling error by category at a 95 percent confidence interval. These sampling errors may be interpreted as indicating the range (plus or minus the figure shown) that the results may be expected to vary from the results that would have been obtained by interviewing all adults in Wisconsin who could have been interviewed.

	Number of Completed Interviews	Sampling Error at 95% Confidence
All Wisconsin Adults	600	3.3%
Men	282	3.9%
Women	318	9.3%
Gun Owners	225	9.9%
Handgun Owners	109	4.7%
Non-Gun Owners	375	5.2%
Children in Household	229	4.3%
No Children in House	371	6.0%



WISCONSIN COUNCIL ON CHILDREN & FAMILIES

Voices For Wisconsin's Children

The Wisconsin Council on Children and Families serves as Wisconsin's leading voice of, and premiere advocate for, children throughout the state.

Emphasizing the core values of fairness, caring, and community, the Council conducts a variety of advocacy activities, including organizing expert research, educating the public, supporting key issues and legislation, and coordinating grassroots activity in communities all across Wisconsin.

In addition to publishing the *WisKids Count Data Book* – which seeks to enrich local, state, and national discussions concerning ways to secure better futures for all children – the Council accomplishes its advocacy through several publications; educational conferences throughout the state; and key projects like the Better Badger Baby Bus Tour, W-2 Watch, the Wisconsin Budget Project, and Advocacy Camp among others.

www.wccf.org

MISSION STATEMENT

The Wisconsin Council on Children and Families is a statewide, multi-issue child advocacy organization. It works to improve the well-being of children and families by advocating for effective health, education, justice and human service programs that are accessible and equitable for children.

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